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REPRESENTATIONS OF MARRIAGE AND MADNESS IN *THE YELLOW WALL-PAPER* (1998) BY CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN AND *THE VEGETARIAN* (2015) BY HAN KANG

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Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso apresentado à Coordenação do Curso de Graduação em Licenciatura Plena em Letras Inglês da Universidade Estadual da Paraíba, como requisito parcial à obtenção do título de Licenciado em Letras Inglês.

Área de concentração: Literatura e Estudos de Gênero.

Orientadora: Profa. Me. Isabela Christina do Nascimento Sousa

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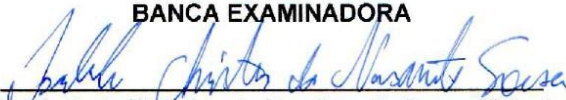
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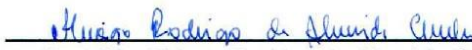
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To my younger self, who never
believed in himself, but never
gave up.

*“Look at yourself, now! Stop eating meat,
and the world will devour you whole”.*

(Han Kang)

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REPRESENTATIONS OF MARRIAGE AND MADNESS IN *THE YELLOW WALL-PAPER* (1998) BY CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN AND *THE VEGETARIAN* (2015) BY HAN KANG

REPRESENTAÇÕES DE CASAMENTO E LOUCURA EM *O PAPEL DE PAREDE AMARELO* (1998) DE CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN E *A VEGETARIANA* (2015) DE HAN KANG

Gabriel Gonçalves Benjamim de Souza¹

ABSTRACT

Social representations refer to socially constructed and shared knowledge that is shaped differently in the mind of each human being and encourages the creation of social groups with similar opinions and ideologies. Hence, even if a literary work is found on a fictional plane, it is created based on the way the author perceives or wants to represent the world, thus being able to point to social aspects of a culture or society. Therefore, this work aimed to analyze the representations of marriage and madness in *The Vegetarian* (2015), by Han Kang, and *The Yellow Wall-paper* (1998), by Charlotte Perkins Gilman; while intended to examine how gender hierarchies within marriage and families are portrayed in both works, and discuss how the subordinate roles that both characters play within their families and marriages contribute to the degradation of their identities and mental states. Hence, this research was based on the ideas of Beauvoir (1956), Ferguson (1991), Sechiyama (2013), and Souza (2020). Moreover, it was possible to identify similarities in the submissive roles of the protagonists in their marriages and families, in manifestations of male control and in the results of the oppression suffered by them, such as their state of insanity and dissociation from human identity, which also brings comfort to them, as they can escape from their human condition.

Keywords: social representations; literary representations; oppression; marriage; madness.

RESUMO

As representações sociais referem-se ao conhecimento socialmente construído e compartilhado que se molda de formas diferentes na mente de cada ser humano e fomenta a criação de grupos sociais como opiniões e ideologias semelhantes. Dessa forma, mesmo uma obra literária se encontrando num plano fictício, esta é criada a partir da forma como o autor percebe ou quis representar o mundo, assim podendo apontar para aspectos sociais de uma cultura ou sociedade. Portanto, este trabalho teve como objetivo analisar as representações de casamento e loucura em *A Vegetariana* (2015) de Han Kang e *O Papel de Parede Amarelo* (1998) de Charlotte

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Perkins Gilman; ao mesmo tempo que, pretendeu examinar como as hierarquias de gênero dentro do casamento e das famílias são retratadas em ambas as obras e discutir como os papéis subordinados que ambos os personagens desempenham dentro de suas famílias e casamentos contribuem para a degradação de suas identidades e estados mentais. Portanto, esta pesquisa foi fundada nas ideias de Beauvoir (1956), Ferguson (1991), Sechiyama (2013) e Souza (2020). Ademais, identificou semelhanças nos papéis submissos das personagens em seus casamentos e família, nas manifestações de controle masculina e nos resultados da opressão sofrida por elas, como seu estado de insanidade e dissociação da identidade humana, o que acaba por lhes trazer conforto, pois assim elas conseguem escapar de sua condição humana.

Palavras-chave: representações sociais; representações literárias; opressão; casamento; loucura.

1 INTRODUCTION

Literature can be a source of social representations and, therefore, indicate different aspects of a culture or society. In this way, feminist studies have sought to investigate what lies behind feminine literary representations, and its possible implications. Hence, literary works such as *The Vegetarian* (2015) and *The Yellow Wall-paper* (1998) deal with protagonists who are involved in problems associated with their gender and instigate discussions regarding women's roles and the way they are represented in the cultures they are inserted into.

Written by the South Korean novelist Han Kang and originally published in 2007, *The Vegetarian* develops the story of Yeong-hye, a woman, who, because of a dream, decides to become vegetarian, thus causing a turmoil within her marriage and her family. Her husband, unhappy with this decision, tries to dissuade her, and unsuccessfully appeals to her family, who also tries to convince her to return to eating meat. Endeavoring to claim her autonomy, the protagonist attempts suicide, and after this moment of fragility, her brother-in-law sees her as an object of sexual desire. After that, she is admitted to a psychiatric hospital, where she is abandoned by everyone, except her sister, and her mental state begins to worsen, because she stops eating everything, as she aims to become a plant.

Additionally, written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and first published in 1892, *The Yellow Wall-paper* is a short story narrated by an unnamed character who is recently married and is suffering from a mental disorder. Based on Gilman's real-life experience, the narrator is subjected to the "rest cure", a rigid treatment founded on resting and isolation with no stimulation for both body and mind. Throughout the story, the character is subjected to being restricted in her bedroom, without engaging in any activity, thus she begins to become obsessed with the room's yellow wallpaper, until she loses her sanity².

² As mentioned in this paragraph, this story was based on Gilman's own story who underwent this same treatment. However, Gilman got divorced, ran away from the treatment, and decided to write this story as a way of opposing the doctor who was treating her. Thus, she proposed to herself the "West-cure", a treatment usually made for men who were experiencing the same illnesses. In the "West-cure", men were supposed to go west and do the opposite of the rest cure, hence engaging in various activities, both physical and mental; and that is what Gilman did too.

In this sense, the main objective of this research is to analyze the representations of marriage and madness in *The Vegetarian* (2015), by Han Kang, and *The Yellow Wall-paper* (1998), by Charlotte Perkins Gilman; in order to analyze how the gender hierarchies inside marriage and family are depicted in both works; and, lastly, to discuss how the submissive roles of both protagonists inside their marriage and their families lead to their identity degradation and mental disorder.

This work is classified as a qualitative research, since it:

[...] considers that there is a dynamic relationship between the real world and the subject, that is, an inseparable link between the objective world and the subjectivity of the subject that cannot be translated into numbers. The interpretation of phenomena and the attribution of meanings are basic in the qualitative research process (Prodanov; Freitas, 2013, p. 70, my translation)³.

Additionally, this research has a bibliographic nature, as it is “[...] prepared from already published material, [...] with the aim of putting the researcher in direct contact with all material already written on the subject of research” (Prodanov; Freitas, 2013, p. 54, my translation)⁴. In this sense, this research is founded on the ideas of Beauvoir (1956), Ferguson (1991), Sechiyama (2013), and Souza (2020).

Through the study of both works, it is possible to observe how Kang and Gilman denounce multiple manifestations of gender oppression by means of the female representations associated with their protagonists. Even though they deal with similar issues, these works have not yet been studied together, and their distancing in time and space reveals that many of the problems women face remain the same for a long time, respecting their singularities, different cultures, and society. Hence, this research raises discussions of how, due to feminine oppression, these works intertwine, even though both are separated by time and space.

2 THE MARITAL INSTITUTION AND LITERARY TRADITION

The institution of marriage has always been one of the focuses of literary studies, as, historically, it was where most female oppression was conceived. In this sense, this section discusses the foundations of the South Korean and American conceptions of marriage, and its influences that still resonate nowadays, in particular in the studied works. As well as to introduce the perspectives of Social Representation and Literary Representation, to enable a better understanding of the objects of study, *The Vegetarian* and *The Yellow Wall-paper*, and how they represent the marital institution.

2.1 South Korean and American Marriages

Throughout the history of western cultures, marriage has not always had a contractual form. In primitive times, women served as a currency of exchange and barter between groups, and did not have a voice in this negotiation; the agreement

³ From the original: “[...] considera que há uma relação dinâmica entre o mundo real e o sujeito, isto é, um vínculo indissociável entre o mundo objetivo e a subjetividade do sujeito que não pode ser traduzido em números. A interpretação dos fenômenos e a atribuição de significados são básicas no processo de pesquisa qualitativa”.

⁴ From the original: “[...] elaborada a partir de material já publicado, [...] com o objetivo de colocar o pesquisador em contato direto com todo material já escrito sobre o assunto da pesquisa”.

used to be made between the family patriarchs. When marriage took a contractual form, it seemed that women would finally have a say in this agreement, instead, the union was made, as commonly happened around the world, by the son-in-law and father-in-law (Beauvoir, 1956).

In this sense, Butler (1999) affirmed that: “[...] the bride functions as a relational term between groups of men; she does not have an identity, and neither does she exchange one identity for another” (p. 50). This statement highlights how, in patriarchal societies, women are not seen as individuals, but as objects that facilitate social relations and bargain between the men. Thus, depriving these women of the opportunity to develop their identity. In Kang's novel, the husband frequently bargains with Yeong-hye's family. Since she is not fulfilling the pre-established ideals of the marital agreement, he calls her family to help him to make her “work correctly”. He phones her relatives to assert that she behaves as asserted because she is not fulfilling their marriage contract the way she should.

Moreover, Simone de Beauvoir (1956) discussed that the form of the marital agreement did not change substantially over the time and the social pressure surrounding marriage always affected women more severely than men. As Beauvoir (1956) exemplified, American women who did not marry were considered socially incomplete individuals, even though they were financially independent. Women must be wedded, if they envisioned to find prestige as a social being. Furthermore, it is important to mention that it has been some decades since Beauvoir made these considerations, although they continue to be part of our reality.

On the other side of the world, in South Korea, the patriarchal conceptions were extremely influenced by Confucian ideals. Confucianism is an ancient Chinese philosophy focused on self-cultivation and providing a moral code to society. One of the pillars that supported this philosophy was the restricted hierarchy system and the family system (Sechiyama, 2013).

This philosophy was used to underpin the power of the *yangban* class⁵, and as a form of acceptance of the doctrines of Zhu Xi, the Chinese philosopher, who sought to create this doctrine focused on government administration, the public welfare and the spiritual training of the population. It was in the Yi dynasty (1392–1910) that Confucianism established itself as the main philosophy of the Joseon dynasty (Sechiyama, 2013). Besides that, as also stated by Sechiyama (2013):

[t]he Confucianism of the Yi dynasty included codes of conduct for these families and for family-based associations, called *munjung*, composed of patrilineal descendants of a founding ancestor. These norms covered manners in daily activity and prescribed the ways in which coming-of-age ceremonies, marriages, funerals and most importantly the rites to worship ancestors were conducted (p. 142-143).

In this sense, Confucianism had a direct influence on South Korean patriarchy, consequently causing an impact on marital and family relationships, particularly in its hierarchies. The doctrine spread gender inequality ideals, in which women were seen as subordinate to men, both inside the marriage and in their families. Proverbs such as: “A woman who cannot count more than ten bowls will enjoy good fortune” and “Ignorant women are more virtuous”, along with expressions such as: “Males and

⁵ During the Joseon Dynasty, the *yangban* belonged to dynastic Korea's conventional aristocracy or governing class. The majority of the yangban were highly educated civil employees and military officers, aristocrats who each personified the Korean Confucian form of well-educated civil servants or military commanders.

females should not sit together after they reach the age of seven” and “Male and female are separate”, stimulated women’s ignorance and gender separation, both in the spatial and hierarchical sense (Sechiyama, 2013).

Besides that, Buja (2022) mentions Russel (1929) who affirms that, analogous to the western patterns, in South Korea, the institution of marriage followed similar ideals. Marriage was seen not as the union of two people, but the union of two families, which sought to unite and perpetuate their lineage. Consequently, loveless marriages were ordinary, since the focus of this institution was not love, and the voices of the bride and groom were not taken into consideration. In the last decades of the 20th century, as stated by Buja (2022), when the idea of love being crucial to a substantial marriage, conservative Koreans considered it revolutionary.

Beauvoir (1956), in *The Second Sex*, affirmed that it was not possible to predict which tendency the world would follow, whether it would remain rooted in conservatism, or if the marital ideals would advance equally both for men and women, because that depends on society’s structure. However, the fact was that male dominance towards women started to be challenged. It has been seven decades since these statements made by Beauvoir, and it is possible to observe that her predictions became, in fact, a reality for women. Although, not for all women.

Cherlin (2004) brings Gillis (1985) who pointed out that the marital institution, in America, Canada and a few other countries from Europe, went through a period from 1850 to 1960 which he named “the era of mandatory marriage”. In that era, especially in the United States, marriages were the only means to achieve an adult life considered regular, that is, having children, living with a partner, as Cherlin (2004) stated: “[i]n the United States, marriage and only marriage was one ticket of admission to a full family life. Prior to marrying, almost no one cohabited with a partner except among the poor and the avant garde” (p. 852). In this way, friends or couples who had not yet consummated their marriage did not usually live in the same home.

In contrast, Cherlin (2004) affirmed that the marital institution was going through a process of deinstitutionalization. In his words, the deinstitutionalization would be: “[...] the weakening of the social norms that define people’s behavior in a social institution such as marriage” (p. 848). This movement faces processes of deconstruction in aspects such as: the mandatory wife role ascribed to women and the women’s obligations within marriage (Cherlin, 2004).

In fact, after two decades of these considerations, it is possible to observe that the norms that governed the institution of marriage have been slowly weakening over the years, especially in highly developed nations, thus allowing new conceptions of marriage, a little freer from patriarchalism. However, as Cherlin affirms: “[w]ithin marriage, roles are more flexible and negotiable, although women still do more than their share of the household work and childrearing” (p. 853).

In this sense, in the following topic, this research discusses the relationship between the concepts of Social Representations and Literary Representations, aligned to the examination of *The Vegetarian* and *The Yellow Wall-paper*. Thus, investigating the connection between fiction and reality, while observing how both works represent their protagonists within their marriages.

2.2 Literary Representations and Marital Ideals

To deepen this discussion and focus on the objects of this analysis, first, it is necessary to comprehend the idea of social representations that was developed by

the social psychologist Serge Moscovici and was based on the perspective of collective representations theorized by Émile Durkheim. Based on this, Jodelet (2002, p. 22) defines Social Representations as: “[...] a form of knowledge socially elaborated and shared, with a practical objective, and that contributes to the construction of a common reality to a social group” (*apud* Arruda, 2010, p. 138, my translation)⁶.

These sets of knowledge are shared by groups of people regarding different types of subjects, such as: social constructs, social phenomena and tangible objects. Thus, it can be said that social representations refer to elements, physical or not, of the real world and the multiple forms that these can assume depending on the mind that shapes them. This is what underpins the creation of social groups and ideologies, as each social group has a perspective on a real-world phenomenon.

Bringing those ideas to a literary perspective, Guerreiro (2010) affirms that: “[t]he literary text is a construction of reality, a <<fictitious reality>>, a <<fictional world>>, it is a representation on another plane” (p. 43, my translation, author’s emphasis)⁷. In accordance with this, Ferguson (1991) also affirms that: “[l]iterary images do not exist in a vacuum, they are related to what history, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and other disciplines—as well as our own experience—tell us about reality” (p. 3)⁸. In this sense, literary representations are based on reality, or the authors’ perception of reality, which may or may not indicate cultural aspects of a society.

With that being said, and recalling what was discussed in the previous topic, the idea of a loveless marriage can be observed in Hang Kang’s novel, *The Vegetarian*, through the perspective of Mr. Cheong, Yeong-hye’s husband, as it can be seen in the following passages: “[t]o be frank, the first time I met her I wasn’t even attracted to her” (Kang, 2015). And, “[h]owever, if there wasn’t any special attraction, nor did any particular drawbacks present themselves, and there was no reason for the two of us not to get married” (Kang, 2015). In the passages above, it is possible to observe how Mr. Cheong’s and Yeong-hye’s marriage happened, by comfort and convenience. He claims that even though he did not see any qualities in his wife, he also did not find any drawbacks.

Furthermore, Ferguson (1991) affirmed that: “*Feminine* has associations of weakness, passivity, and dependence, all of which are pejorative terms” (p. 20, author’s emphasis). In *The Vegetarian*, Mr. Cheong claims that one of the traits which made his wife “attractive” was her passive personality, as depicted here: “[t]he passive personality of this woman in whom I could detect neither freshness nor charm, or anything especially refined, suited me down to the ground” (Kang, 2015). In this sense, Ferguson (1991) highlighted that:

[...] the traits associated with feminine came to be not only expected but admired in women, the vast majority of whom throughout history have been wives. To this day women who are aggressive or even assertive are usually perceived negatively (p. 20).

⁶ From the original: “As representações sociais são uma forma de conhecimento socialmente elaborado e compartilhado, com um objetivo prático, e que contribui para a construção de uma realidade comum a um conjunto social”.

⁷ From the original: “O texto literário é uma construção da realidade, uma <<realidade fictícia>>, um <<mundo fictício>>, é uma representação num outro plano”.

⁸ It is worth mentioning that the idea which Ferguson refers to as “Literary Images” is nowadays best understood as “Literary Representations”.

This can also be observed in *The Vegetarian*, since Mr. Cheong himself is aware of these demands imposed on women, as represented here: “[t]here’s nothing wrong with keeping quiet; after all, hadn’t women traditionally been expected to be demure and restrained?” (Kang, 2015). In this sense, it is interesting to note how this representation reinforces how men are aware that nowadays certain behavioral standards are no longer imposed on women, but they use the historical path of female oppression to still demand the same submissive behaviors.

Arguably, men themselves created this conception of an ideal wife with these particularities so that they would become more vulnerable and susceptible to male manipulation and control. Besides that, it is worth mentioning that these conceptions are still intensely reinforced in countries with more conservative cultures, and which are still more tied to old patriarchal conceptions. Thus, it is interesting how this narrative is represented in a decade close to ours, but it still has elements that represent older conservative marriages, namely, the unbalanced power hierarchy between husband and wife.

Meanwhile, *The Yellow Wall-paper* seems to contrast with *The Vegetarian*, maybe because the narrator of the story is the wife. Thus, here we see through the wife’s perspective who finds herself intensely in love with her husband (John), and describes him as: “[...] very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction” (Gilman, 1998, p. 30). In the story, it is possible to see that the protagonist romanticizes certain behaviors of her husband such as the excessive care, however, as will be discussed in section 3.2, this is just a veiled form of control over the protagonist.

This is also demonstrated in the following excerpt: “I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more” (Gilman, 1998, p. 30). Thus, the protagonist has a feeling of guilt for not feeling grateful sometimes for all this love and care from her husband. In fact, when compared this feeling to this excerpt: “I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes” (*ibidem*, p. 30), it is possible to perceive the conflicting feelings that exist in the narrator, as she feels angry at her husband and his limiting impositions, but she also feels guilty for not feeling grateful. And, this is one of the mechanisms by which men perpetuate their control, causing a feeling of guilt in women, especially when they do not conform to what they expect.

Finally, this feeling of guilt that *The Yellow Wall-paper*’s narrator feels may point to a symptom of the time in which the story takes place. In a society and time when passionate marriages were not the norm, feeling discontented with an excess of “care and love” can indeed seem ungrateful; even if this is a distorted perception of what love is. Therefore, it is interesting to observe the complexity of the marital representations in both works, since *The Vegetarian* directly portrays a husband who does not love his wife, and *The Yellow Wall-paper* presents a wife who feels loved by her husband. However, in the end, being loved or not, both women end up being subjugated by their partners inside their marriages. Consequently, in both stories, marriage becomes a way to control women’s bodies, behavior, and thoughts.

3 UNDERMINING THE HIERARCHY IN *THE VEGETARIAN* AND *THE YELLOW WALL-PAPER*.

Historically, men have been considered fulfilled and independent beings; this has been commonly justified by the laborious contribution that men have provided for the social group he has been inserted to. Meanwhile, women have had attributions

which placed them as contributors to the functioning of society, such as: housekeeper and mother. However, those functions have been used to confine and restrain women, and they have not guaranteed any equality between men and women⁹ (Beauvoir, 1956).

Hence, the first topic of this section discusses the literary representations regarding the social role of wife assigned to women, which, in past times, used to nullify the possibility of them having an activity outside the home environment. However, with the social changes that have taken place over the last century, many doors have opened for women, thus, this topic also analyzes and highlights the social changes that have occurred for women over the years and how they are represented in both works.

While, in the second topic, it is pointed out different ways that men use to maintain their dominance over women, therefore, this topic analyzes how these gender oppression representations occur in both works. And, it is observed that, even though men always look for new mechanisms to control women, women also look for ways to challenge and undermine this hierarchy.

3.1 Women's Career: From Domestic to Multitasking

From a young age, girls were taught, especially by their family, to long for marriage. Beauvoir (1956) affirmed that: “[...] for girls marriage is the only means of integration in the community, and if they remain unwanted, they are, socially viewed, so much wastage” (p. 417). This happens because the male dominance was always reaffirmed through their social and economic higher position, and this ends up limiting girls' future perspectives. As stated by Beauvoir (1956):

[e]verything tells the young girl that it is for her best interests to become their vassal: her parents urge her to it; the father is proud of his daughter's success, the mother sees a prosperous future in it; friends envy and admire the one who gets the most masculine attention (p. 327).

Thus, Beauvoir (1956) affirmed that marriage becomes the only viable “career” for women to follow, since it is less tiring and socially considered honorable. Besides, it provides them social decorum, sexual and love fulfillment, concomitantly, as a wife and mother. This is still a reality for many women around the world, however the world no longer works just through these rules mentioned by Beauvoir, a lot has changed and this represents a social conquest, a victory over these patriarchal conceptions. Now, women must work and get married, but the social pressure on the latter is no longer what it used to be.

This can be observed in *The Yellow Wall-paper*, since here the narrator has marriage and motherhood as her profession, even if she cannot fulfill these roles properly. But also, it is possible to observe the change that occurs during the time that separates the works, because in *The Vegetarian* the narrator has a career, even if it is not quite relevant, and she also needs to fulfill the social roles of a wife and housewife. These representations of female careers, in both works, point to the same sociocultural aspects mentioned above that refer to the time in which each work takes place.

⁹ Gilman herself discusses this in the poem *To the Young Wife*, in which she questions the young wives if they are truly satisfied with dedicating their lives to their husbands, if they are happy with being housewives, with being limited to that environment, being queens of such a small and confined space.

Moreover, as stated by Ferguson (1991): “[i]n the western world and particularly in the United States, the role of weak wife is central to women's identity” (p. 20). In the short story, the narrator is not capable and allowed by her husband to properly take care of their house, thus, Jennie (her sister-in-law) is the one who does it. The narrator also reinforces Jennie's role as a domestic woman by affirming that: “[s]he is a perfect, and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession” (Gilman, 1998, p. 33). In this regard, the narrator describes this occupation as a good thing and suggests that Jennie is quite happy by doing it. Besides that, the narrator also presents Mary as the person who takes care of her baby, as she cannot do it because of her indisposition.

Even though the narrator is glad for having these women helping her with the housework and the baby, she feels bothered by her inability to fulfill her roles as a wife and mother, as she states in the following passage: “I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already!” (Gilman, 1998, p. 31). In other words, the protagonist feels like a burden to her husband and feels frustrated for not being able to fulfill the social roles assigned to her. The character thus feels insufficient for not being able to fulfill the only forms of identity that were socially allowed to her, being a good wife, housewife, and mother.

Nevertheless, from a feminist perspective, Beauvoir (1956) observed that society was experiencing a transition, and the male dominance over women was going downwards. This change could be observed, especially, after the suffragist movement, which took place in the late 19th century and early 20th century, and also the second wave of the feminist movement, in the 60s and 70s. In fact, as predicted by Beauvoir, in most parts of the world, today there is a different perception of what it means to be a woman, and the places they can/should occupy.

Consequently, as affirmed by Ferguson (1991), nowadays, women can occupy different positions since they are not as restrained as before. Although, in different regions of the world, the marital institution still operates according to the same ancient norms, since they work differently from each culture. Similarly to this pattern, in *The Vegetarian*, Yeong-hye's husband affirms that she has a job, but this work does not seem to be relevant in the story, since the only time this job is mentioned is here: “She ended up with a job as an assistant instructor at the computer graphics college she'd attended for a year, and was subcontracted by a comics publisher to work on the words for their speech bubbles, which she could do from home” (Kang, 2015).

In this sense, her job does not seem to have any influence in their lives and in the story. In fact, Yeong-hye's only job that is mentioned numerous times and her absence causes her husband discomfort, is in her career as a wife and housewife. This lack of relevance of Yeong-hye's work in the story can be interpreted as an erasure of the narrator (her husband) because her work is not relevant to him, or also an attempt by the author to reinforce that even though women can work, her work as a wife is still seen as a priority and part of her identity. This can be seen by observing the following passage:

[...] ever since we'd got married she had proved herself a more than competent cook, and I'd always been impressed by her way with food. Tongs in one hand and a large pair of scissors in the other, she'd flipped rib meat in a sizzling pan while snipping it into bite-sized pieces, her movements deft and practiced. Her fragrant, caramelized deep-fried belly pork was achieved by marinating the meat in minced ginger and glutinous starch syrup. Her signature dish had been wafer-thin slices of beef seasoned with black pepper and sesame oil, then coated with sticky rice powder as generously as

you would with rice cakes or pancakes, and dipped in bubbling shabu-shabu broth. She'd made bibimbap with bean sprouts, minced beef, and pre-soaked rice stir-fried in sesame oil. There had also been a thick chicken and duck soup with large chunks of potato, and a spicy broth packed full of tender clams and mussels, of which I could happily polish off three helpings in a single sitting (Kang, 2015).

As shown previously, her husband takes around three lines to describe Yeong-hye's occupation, however, in the excerpt above, he takes around ten lines to thoroughly describe his wife's cooking skills. Therefore, even though Yeong-hye also had an occupation, such as her husband, cooking, a household skill, is considered a natural characteristic of her and even must be admired, as well as he mentions her routines around the house several times, and the fact that he gets angry when she no longer fulfills these roles.

This happens because, as stated by Ferguson (1991), “[t]hroughout history, most women have had to be productive workers as well as wives and mothers; but their status as workers and as autonomous agents is influenced strongly by their biological roles” (p. 30). Thus, both for Yeong-hye and *The Yellow Wall-paper's* narrator, there is a pressure for fulfilling the female biological role imposed on them, whether through self-demand (in *The Yellow Wall-paper*) as discussed previously, or through external pressure as seen in the following statement by Yeong-hye's husband: “I sometimes wondered whether I would ever get to hear the reassuring sound of a child gurgling ‘dada,’ and meaning me” (Kang, 2015).

However, in *The Vegetarian* the one who worries about children is the husband, Yeong-hye never presents this concern. Observing this contrast between the external concern for the woman, in *The Vegetarian*, with women's self-pressure in *The Yellow Wall-paper*, it is possible to observe a shift in the way representations of women have been constructed throughout time, which can point us to the social differences that have been occurring since the last century.

As Buja (2022) affirms: “[...] emulating their Western peers, many modern Korean women tend to feel less bound by the patriarchal rules and try to live a new life” (p. 68). In other words, even though women continue to be oppressed, the changes that have occurred have been enough for them to not feel as restricted as before, just like Yeong-hye feels.

In this sense, thanks to feminist conquests, nowadays it is possible to note that men cannot rely on the same forms of female control that they were previously free to use. Therefore, although extreme forms of control such as aggression still occur today, men have always found new discrete mechanisms to maintain their position of power. And, in the following topic, it is discussed some of the mechanisms used by the men, in the studied works, to keep the female protagonists under their dominance.

3.2 Control Over the Female Body and Women Becoming

Throughout history, men have not always vehemently expressed their attempt to maintain their place of power. However, whether masked or not, it is a fact that men have always sought different mechanisms to continue to subjugate women. In both *The Yellow Wall-paper* and *The Vegetarian*, the male characters express their attempts to control women in different ways, such as the infantilization of women, which Souza (2020) affirms “[...] is a restriction mechanism that imposes man's

control over women, taking her from a position of reason (adult) to one of non-reason and innocence (childhood)” (p. 45, my translation)¹⁰.

In *The Vegetarian*, the woman's infantilization discourse is linked to a possible pedophile longing by Yeong-hye's brother-in-law (the narrator of the second chapter), in which he becomes attracted to his sister-in-law when he discovers that even though she is older, she might still has a mongolian mark. This birthmark that appears on the lumbosacral area and buttocks is common to most East Asian people, but it tends to disappear between the ages of 3-5, or at most in adolescence.

Yeong-hye's brother-in-law finds out from his wife about the possible existence of the mark through his wife, and this possibility leads him to sexual thoughts, as demonstrated here:

[i]n his mind, the fact that his sister-in-law still had a Mongolian mark on her buttocks became inexplicably bound up with the image of men and women having sex, their naked bodies completely covered with painted flowers. The causality linking these two things was so clear, so obvious, as to be somehow beyond comprehension, and thus it became etched into his mind (Kang, 2015).

Moreover, throughout the second chapter, he continues to feel attraction and sexual desire for her mongolian mark, until he “[...] imagined himself pulling down her trousers just enough to reveal the blue brand of the Mongolian mark. He stood there and masturbated. A moan escaped from between his lips [...]” (Kang, 2015). In other words, this sexual desire linked to the mark points to traces of a pedophilic desire on the part of Yeong-hye's brother-in-law, since even though she is no longer a child, she still has one characteristic that is mostly associated with one. Hence, infantilization appears here

In *The Yellow Wall-paper*, the infantilization discourse is also highlighted and reinforced by different elements since the protagonist is located in a former nursery and children's room, as depicted in the following excerpt: “[i]t was nursery first and then playground and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls” (Gilman, 1998, p. 31). Additionally, Souza (2020) also calls attention to how the husband's speech towards his wife is assimilated with a father's speech towards a child, as portrayed in here: “[w]hat is it, little girl?” he said. ‘Don’t go walking about like that—you’ll get cold’” (Gilman, 1998, p. 36).

Thus, it is also possible to observe how this excessive “concern” and “care” for women’s bodies and health is a form of representation of the hegemonic discourse of male power that aims to control the female body. In *The Yellow Wall-paper*, this can be seen in John's behavior, in which his speech of concern for his wife's health, ends up controlling every move she makes, besides preventing her from practicing regular activities, including writing, an essential point of development to the narrator’s identity.

In the story, the protagonist insists that she does not feel comfortable in the room she is in, especially because of the yellow wallpaper, however, her husband disregards her feelings and insists that she stay there, because he knows what is best for her. In this perspective, as Treichler (1984) affirms: “[i]t is a male voice that

¹⁰ From the original: “A infantilização é um mecanismo de cerceamento que impõe o controle do homem sobre a mulher, tirando-a de uma posição de razão (adulta), para uma de não-razão e inocência (infância)”.

privileges the rational, the practical, and the observable” (p. 65), thus it is man who always has reason and the final word, as he is the holder of knowledge and power.

Moreover, in the short story, the narrator reinforces several times how writing was a relief for her, because it was an escape from the mental disorder she was going through, as she states here: “I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me” (Gilman, 1998, p. 32). In spite of that, her husband always took a stand against her writing, due to the resting cure she was being treated with.

The “rest cure” or “bed rest” was a medical treatment widely popularized in the United States in the 19th century that sought, especially, the treatment of mental illnesses such as “hysteria”¹¹. This treatment, which Gilman herself was also subjected to during her pregnancy and which inspired the idea of *The Yellow Wall-paper*, was based on the idea of a restricted and forced rest lasting weeks or months, in which no physical or bodily stimulation was allowed.

However, the protagonist no longer accepts this position of submission to all her husband's desires, and his rest cure, and makes her writing a resistance against male power. As Souza (2020) highlights: “[i]n this way, even though she remains silent in front of her husband, she disobeys him, using the word that was taken from her to confront him, even if indirectly” (p. 47, my translation)¹². Hence, even without a direct confrontation, this woman challenges male authority and its impositions.

In *The Vegetarian*, the male discourse aiming control comes through Mr. Cheong's supposed concern because Yeong-hye has stopped eating meat. In his narrative, Mr. Cheong elucidates the reasons for his concern about his wife's vegetarianism. The way she changes from this, and how this ends up being reflected in his life is his real concern with vegetarianism. This can be perceived through Mr. Cheong's dissatisfaction with how things changed after his wife became vegetarian, as portrayed in the following passage: “[i]n the five years we'd been married, this was the first time I'd had to go to work without her handing me my things and seeing me off” (Kang, 2015).

After Mr. Cheong realizes that alone he will not be able to change Yeong-hye's behavior, as depicted in this passage: “[b]ut I had a feeling that none of it would make the slightest bit of difference. Neither rage nor persuasion would succeed in moving her, and I would be unable to take matters into my own hands.” (Kang, 2015), he manipulates Yeong-hye's family with his “concern”. Just by being part of the Korean society, Mr. Cheong is aware of how the family hierarchy is socially strong in South Korea, and is commonly respected by individuals, therefore, the hierarchical pressure on Yeong-hye's body and decisions would be greater, and she would probably comply with them.

Consequently, at a family reunion, instigated by Mr. Cheong, Yeong-hye's family confronts her about the fact that she does not want to eat meat anymore. Again, Yeong-hye's father disguises his unconscious desire for control over his daughter's body with speech of concern for her health, as depicted here: “[e]at it! Listen to what your father's telling you and eat. Everything I say is for your own good. So why act like this if it makes you ill?” (Kang, 2015). Due to Yeong-hye's resistance to surrender to the family's will, her father slaps her face while forcing her to eat

¹¹ The name hysteria is derived from the Greek word *hystera* which means uterus. In the 19th century, female hysteria was considered a diagnosable physical condition in women, and the diagnosis was based on the belief that women were more prone to mental and behavioral problems.

¹² From the original: “Deste modo, mesmo se calando frente ao marido, ela o desobedece, usando a palavra que lhe fora retirada para confrontá-lo, mesmo que indiretamente”.

some meat, as shown here: “[i]n an instant, his flat palm cleaved the empty space. My wife cupped her cheek in her hand” (Kang, 2015).

The slap on her face, in this situation, serves as a warning, a reminder that the patriarch is the one who holds a position of power. And, since the slap was not enough, the father tries to shove the meat down her throat, as depicted in the following passage: “[h]aving thrown down the chopsticks, he now picked up a piece of pork with his fingers and approached my wife. She was hesitantly backing away when her brother seized her and sat her down” (Kang, 2015).

Realizing that he would not be able to do it by himself, the patriarch asks Yeong-hye’s husband and brother to help him and hold her arms, as shown here: “[g]rab her arms, quickly. You too, Mr. Cheong” (Kang, 2015). To understand the complexity of this scene, it is crucial to observe how all the closest men in Yeong-hye’s life were around her, trying to tame her. Actually, they are all the men who, socially, are considered to be in a position of power over her, and she must respect: the father, the brother, and the husband. Withal, she does not accept this position anymore, and attempts suicide in front of her family, as a way to claim control over her own body. However, this will be better scrutinized in section four.

Another manifestation of control over the female body, in *The Vegetarian*, comes through the sexual abuse that Mr. Cheong commits with his wife. After becoming a vegetarian, Yeong-hye also stops having sexual intercourse with her husband, as she claims that the problem is the smell of meat that exhales from her husband’s body, as shown here: “[t]he meat smell. Your body smells of meat” (Kang, 2015). This way, the husband disrespects and violates his wife and her body, finding in these sexual abuses a way to restore his power of dominance, as depicted here: “I grabbed hold of my wife and pushed her to the floor. Pinning down her struggling arms and tugging off her trousers, I became unexpectedly aroused” (*ibidem*, p. 23).

Besides that, Yeong-hye’s repulse for meat, and the meat smell, resemble the narrator’s repulsion for the yellow wallpaper in Gilman’s story. From Yeong-hye’s perspective, the meat can remind her of how she feels: just a piece of meat. And, the smell of meat she smells on her husband may just be a reminder of the way she felt before becoming vegetarian. Akin to the yellow wallpaper in *The Yellow Wall-paper*, that can remind the narrator of all the oppression and restriction she suffers and prevents her from acting as a thinking and autonomous individual.

In this way, both the vegetarianism, in *The Vegetarian*, and the writing, in *The Yellow Wall-paper*, can be considered transition points for these women, where they abandon a position of passivity and stop submitting themselves only to the decisions of the people around them, especially men. These women start to defy the position they have been given, and, finally, it is possible to affirm that they enter the transitional point of women becoming.

While choosing which stories to use for the chapter “Women Becoming”, Ferguson (1991) explains what reasons made her choose these stories for this chapter, and, consequently, she defined what is a “woman becoming”. In this sense, first it is possible to affirm that this idea refers to: “[...] women characters and speakers coming to an awareness of themselves and other women and somehow creating a sense of self, an identity different from any prescribed by traditional images” (Ferguson, 1991, p. 435).

Furthermore, Ferguson (1991) reinforces how stories that contain women becoming depict and focus on the process of women and their roles emerging while constructing their identity. Besides, she also affirms that:

[n]ot content to be, the women [...] are agents, actors, doers. They refuse “to move to the rhythms of others”, they speak out, stand up, dive alone, choose, learn to read, learn to write, defy the law, work, dance, sing, walk, help others, dream, hope (Ferguson, 1991, p. 435).

Therefore, Ferguson (1991) affirms that works involving the idea of women becoming can also focus on the pain of process and the slow change, which is the case of the works that are being studied here. In both stories, male power domination seeks a way to control and subjugate the women, especially in matters essential to the construction of the identity and emancipation of them, because this process of becoming is perceived by men as a way of challenging their higher *locus* in the social hierarchy.

This idea can be observed through men's attempts to thwart and restrict these women, both in *The Yellow Wall-paper's* protagonist writing and in Yeong-hye's vegetarianism in *The Vegetarian*. In the first one, the narrator states that John does not like that she writes, as presented here: “[t]here comes John, and I must put this away,—he hates to have me write a word” (Gilman, 1998, p. 31).

Meanwhile, in the South Korean novel, as Yeong-hye is explicitly subversive, the dissatisfaction of her family members ends up being more intense than John's dissatisfaction with the protagonist of *The Yellow Wall-paper*. For instance, Yeong-hye's husband seeks to find an answer for her vegetarianism, but he concludes that: “[i]n any other case, it was nothing but sheer obstinacy for a wife to go against her husband's wishes as mine had done” (Kang, 2015). Furthermore, Mr. Cheong also states:

If it had all been just another instance of a woman's giving up meat in order to lose weight then there would have been no need to worry, but I was convinced that there was more going on here than a simple case of vegetarianism (Kang, 2015).

In the previous passage, one can also observe how the husband states that he would accept his wife's vegetarianism if it favored the search for an aesthetic standard. In other words, a female stand mainly displeases men/husbands when there is nothing in return for them. As stated by Ferguson (2020): “[w]omen are admired not for their own individual characteristics but for those appropriate to the role of wife” (p. 20).

In this sense, the wives' identity constructions are perceived negatively by the husbands, as they lead them to question the social position they find themselves in. Therefore, women/wives should only look for characteristics and behaviors that reinforce their already established role, otherwise, this can be seen as a defiance to male power, thus causing males to respond with repression.

4 PSYCHOLOGICAL DEGRADATION IN *THE VEGETARIAN* AND *THE YELLOW WALL-PAPER*

"The madwoman" has been one of the most prominent representations discussed in American feminist literary criticism since the 1960s. Autobiographical fictions, such as *The Yellow Wall-paper*, denounced the oppression suffered by some feminine authors which represented psychological crises. In the future, these stories

would serve as a source of reflection on the characters' conditions and, thus, pointing out aspects of these authors' experiences (Schlichter, 2003).

Meanwhile, even though *The Vegetarian* belongs to a completely fictional scope, it is interesting to observe the similarities between the progress of the characters' narrative and how, due to the oppressive male discourse, both characters end up disassociating from their identities. Thus, in this section, it is discussed how the manifestations of oppression towards the protagonists of both works, whether explicit or not, causes an identity and psychological degradation in the characters.

4.1 Oppression: Loss of Identity and Sanity

Identities are directly influenced by culture and it is possible to affirm that the rules that define them tend to change from time to time and from one culture to another. Therefore, Funck (2011) highlights how social and cultural norms, in this case, from a gender perspective, are permeated by issues of class, race, religion, nationality, among others. In the studied works, this can be observed through the differences found in the characters' realities, since they are separated by time and space, thus being influenced by their cultures and nationalities too. Hence, the stories narrated in these works enable the reader to reflect on the arbitrariness and the invisible codes associated with the ways women are represented in literature, and how those representations relate to the cultures in which they were produced.

Accordingly, Funck (2011) affirms that “[...] a woman is an individual whose subjectivation occurs within norms and behaviors socially defined as feminine by the cultural context in which she is inserted, whether accepting them or rebelling against them” (p. 67, my translation)¹³. However, as mentioned previously, women who tend to rebel against the identity norms imposed on them tend to suffer repression so that they once again behave within what is socially and culturally pre-established for them. This ends up being suffocating for women, as it does not allow them to experience new ways of living, thinking and acting.

One of the ambivalences surrounding the issues of identity is that it concerns something that is collective and at the same time it is individual; it is something that makes the subject unique. In most societies, regardless of the time, the identities available for women either restrict their opportunities or burden them with negative stereotypes such as the madwoman. Weeks (2002) states that when the discourse of identity aligns with that of religion, law, psychiatry, it prescribes what is and what is not normal in that society. “It is in this sense that the imposition of identity can be seen as a crude tactic of power, designed to obscure the real human diversity with the strict categorisations of uniformity” (Weeks, 2002, p. 187).

Additionally, it is important to remember that this repressive behavior is also commonly reproduced among women as well, as many end up finding themselves in a position that does not allow them to criticize their social *locus*, thus adapting and conforming to this reality. In *The Vegetarian*, this can be observed through the behavior of Yeong-hye's mother and sister. During the previously mentioned family conflicts, in which Yeong-hye was forced to eat meat, her mother and sister assumed a position in line with the men. Later, Yeong-hye's mother also demonstrates a feeling of conformity by admonishing Yeong-hye: “Stop eating meat, and the world will

¹³ From the original: “[...] uma mulher é um indivíduo cuja subjetivação ocorre den-tro de normas e comportamentos socialmente definidos como femininos pelo contexto cultural em que se insere, seja aceitando-os ou rebelando-se contra eles”.

devour you whole” (Kang, 2015). Through this metaphor, Mrs. Kim depicts her clear perception of the rules the world works by, and her perspective of conformity to her position in it. Thus, those who do not adapt to the uniformity required by society end up being devoured by it.

It is interesting to perceive, in both stories, how the male discourse labels women as insane. As mentioned previously by Treichler (1954), men are usually linked to rationality, in this way, they are the ones who define and classify what is part of the pattern of normal and what does not belong to it. Therefore, it is observed that, in both *The Vegetarian* and *The Yellow Wall-paper*, placing women in a state of mental disorder is a strategy of control disguised as a medical concern, once that it removes even more the power of decision and autonomy of their hands.

In *The Yellow Wall-paper*, the protagonist is already in a state of mental disorder, however, the diagnosis and treatment provided by her husband and brother, who are doctors, place her in an even worse position than she was in. As Treichler (1954) affirms that: “[t]he diagnostic language of the physician is coupled with the paternalistic language of the husband to create a formidable array of controls over her behavior” (p. 65). In this way, it is possible to see that the control over their bodies is directly linked to the limitation of their identities as well, since a madperson is mostly depicted as someone who is out of their mind, not behaving as oneself. In the case of Kang’s novel, the protagonist stopped acting like the submissive wife, in Gilman’s story, the narrator wanted freedom for her routine, as well as being able to write.

In this latter, the treatment called “rest cure” makes it impossible for the woman to perform any action, physical or intellectual, consequently being responsible for the worsening of the protagonist’s psychological condition, even leading her to a process of dissociation with her human side. The narrator herself affirms that: “[i]t is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight. Just this nervous weakness I suppose” (Gilman, 1998, p. 35). Through this, the narrator shows that her treatment, instead of helping her, has only worsened her condition.

Furthermore, events such as the narrator being placed in a room that was once a nursery room, as seen in one of the excerpts from the last topic, reinforce and constantly remind the character of her mental state. And, even with his wife’s dissatisfaction, John keeps her in the room, hence this can be understood as an attempt to keep her in that state, he is the male rational figure and the medical authority, thus giving her the diagnosis and the order. That bedroom is the place and treatment suitable for a woman who cannot take responsibility for her actions, a crazy woman.

Throughout the story, it is possible to see that she cannot do any activity and since she is confined to that room, this begins to lead her to an obsession with the yellow wallpaper, as depicted in the following passage:

[i]t is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide-plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions. The color is repellent, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight (Gilman, 1998, p. 31).

Furthermore, it is interesting to note the fixation with the color of the wallpaper, coupled with its smell. Here, this sensory aspect begins with an obsession with the wallpaper, until she then defines it as a smell of yellow, as portrayed here: “[b]ut now

I am used to it. The only thing I can think of that it is like is the color of the paper! A yellow smell” (Gilman, 1998, p. 39). In Kang’s novel, the object of obsession was the meat and, in this sense, the meat smell, that she could sense even in her husband. In addition, aside from the fact that just them are able to smell those odors, the objects that emanate them are intrinsically linked to their agents of restrictions: Yeong-hye’s husband and the yellow room from Gilman’s story. In other words, this sensory factor is always there reminding them of the situation they are being subjected to.

Moreover, her mental disorder continues to worsen and reaches the point where the narrator finally loses her connection with her human consciousness. Since the oppression and restriction do not cease, neither does her mental degradation. Thus, at the end of the story, due to the protagonist’s inability to free herself from that situation, she enters a state of insanity and dissociation from her human identity, and starts reproducing animalistic behaviors, as depicted in the following excerpt:

I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder. "I've got out at last," said I, "in spite of you and Jane! And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time! (Gilman, 1998, p. 42).

In this sense, the fact that she crawls on the floor, portraying animalistic behavior, and does not understand the reason for her husband's horror shows how dissociated she was from her human side at that moment. In addition, it is possible to observe a certain metaphorical meaning when she, in this animalistic state, manages to overcome her husband and "creep over him".

Hence, in both *The Yellow Wall-paper* and *The Vegetarian*, the characters find in this state of "madness" an escape from their human condition, whether in the first where the protagonist shows signs of animalization or in the latter, where Yeong-hye seeks to become a tree, as depicted here: “‘I’m not an animal anymore, sister,’ she said, first scanning the empty ward as if about to disclose a momentous secret. ‘I don’t need to eat, not now. I can live without it. All I need is sunlight’” (Kang, 2015). In this way, although Yeong-hye goes to an opposite side of dissociation, wanting to escape her animal-human condition, it is still possible to see how this represents her attempt to escape reality. She did not just want to stop eating meat, she wanted to stop feeling like one too.

Savitri (2018) also discusses how both Yeong-hye's suicide attempt and this desire to become a tree show extreme attempts to finally take control over her body, then she affirms that Yeong-hye’s:

[...] ‘madness’ behavior to consider herself as a tree at the end of the story can be understood as, her effort to resist and liberate herself over shackles of patriarchy construction, that seize her ‘voice’. This also shows the freedom of a woman, to master her own self and release all of social norm entanglement (Savitri, 2018, p. 9).

Furthermore, it is interesting to note how the perception of what it means to be mentally deranged in those two books is defined by men, the protagonists’ husbands. Yeong-hye’s non-conformity and the fact that she expresses the dreams that resulted in her vegetarianism already make her being perceived as insane, as shown here: “I never inquired as to the nature of this dream. I’d already had to listen once to that crazy spiel about the barn in the dark woods, the face reflected in the pool of blood

and all the rest of it, and once had been more than enough” (Kang, 2015). Besides, it is worth mentioning how this label of "crazy woman", is intrinsically linked to sexism, since it is a way of taking women out of their position of rational being, and, in *The Vegetarian*, it does not come exclusively from the speech, but comes alongside all the extreme attitudes of the people around Yeong-hye that make her feel insane for having made an autonomous decision.

Hence, a cause and effect relationship can be found here, associating madness as a product of the oppression suffered by both women, but a broader analysis of the complexity of these relationships is necessary. “Madness” in Gilman’s and Kang’s works is a masculine label for these women who do not comply with the identity and the behaviors provided by society for them and, however, the deviant behaviors that the characters develop are the result of a dissociation in order to, somehow, escape this condition they were subjected to.

Thus, in both stories, insanity creeps in, being fed slowly, with speeches, attitudes, and controls over the protagonists, which generate obsessions about elements that represent what they want to escape. Consequently, they silently climb into a state of dissociation and insanity, until they are unrecognizable as the women/human beings they once were. Yet, they still find a certain comfort in this outcome, because, for them, being an animal or a plant is better than being a woman.

5 CLOSING REMARKS

This research aimed to analyze the works *The Vegetarian* (2015) and *The Yellow Wall-paper* (1998), searching for representative aspects that denounce the abuse suffered by the characters and trying to understand how these works from such different time and contexts can intertwine. In this way, the research was justified through the observation of how these stories are social and cultural products that can point to the mechanics of how those societies work.

Through this research, it was possible to identify the multiple situations these works can be related with each other, as well as the various male attempts, especially within their marriages, to keep their wives within the conservative regime of the institution of marriage, restricting them and frustrating their attempts at subjectification and their identity developments. In addition to the similarities in the manifestations of control over these women’s bodies, which happened through the excessive care, infantilization, abuse (in *The Vegetarian*), frustration and prevention that these women did not explore new versions of themselves, as these would consequently lead them to question their social *locus*, and challenge male supremacy.

Moreover, the complexities surrounding the marital representations of the analyzed works were also explored, as they indicate that in the two marriages it did not matter whether the relationship was based on love or not, in the end, both women experienced similar situations of oppression, in *The Yellow Wall-paper*, it was only disguised as love. Besides, to identify how all these aspects mentioned above relate to the psychological degradation of the characters, and leads them to a dissociation of their human identity, which serves as an escape from their condition and a way to overcome oppression.

In this way, through its representations, Literature demonstrates its reflective power, enabling new processes of subjectification while making us question the world around us, and helping us understand the mechanisms by which it operates. Hence, whether through it or through the reflection processes it allows, literature enables us

to question our social *locus* and to look carefully at the reality of others, even if it is fictional.

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